

1 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
2 FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

3 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

4 Plaintiff

5 v.

6 CRIMINAL 07-0041 (JAG)

7 ALEXIS LUNA ILARRAZA,

8 Defendant

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11 MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

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13 I. INTRODUCTION

14 This matter is before the court on motion to suppress evidence filed by
15 defendant Alexis Luna Ilarraza on April 13, 2007. (Docket No. 16.) The United
16 States filed a motion in opposition on May 29, 2007. (Docket No. 22.) Both
17 parties stated in their motions that a hearing would assist the court to rule on the
18 motion. Accordingly, an evidentiary hearing was held on the motion to suppress
19 on June 1, 2007. (Docket No. 24.) The United States was represented by
20 Assistant United States Attorney G. Andrew Massucco, the defendant by Assistant
21 Federal Public Defender Héctor L. Ramos-Vega. At said hearing, four witnesses
22 testified: Officer Ivette Berrios from the Tactical Operations Center in Carolina,
23 Puerto Rico; defendant Alexis Luna Ilarraza; Elizabeth Arzuaga Cos, common-law
24 wife of the defendant, and Special Agent Celinéz Núñez of the Bureau of Alcohol,
25 Tobacco and Firearms.
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3 II. PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

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5 On January 31, 2007, the defendant was indicted by a grand jury. The
6 indictment consists of three counts. In Count One, the defendant is charged with
7 knowingly and unlawfully possessing with intent to distribute a mixture or
8 substance containing a detectable amount of marijuana (approximately ten (10)
9 baggies weighing one (1) pound each), a Schedule 1, Controlled Substance, in
10 violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1) and § 841(b)(1)(A). Count Two charges the
11 defendant with knowingly and willfully possessing a firearm, as that term is
12 defined by 18 U.S.C. § 921(a)(3), and ammunition to wit: a loaded Smith and
13 Wesson .40 caliber pistol, model SW40V with an obliterated serial number, in
14 furtherance of the commission of a drug trafficking crime punishable under the
15 Controlled Substances Act in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1), involving
16 possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance as charged in Count
17 One of the indictment, as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 924(c)(2), which may be
18 prosecuted in a court of the United States. All in violation of 18 U.S.C. §
19 924(c)(1)(A)(I). Count Three similarly charges the defendant with knowingly and
20 willfully possessing a firearm and ammunition, as those terms are defined in 18
21 U.S.C. § 921(a)(3) and § 921(a)(17)(A) respectively, that is, a loaded Smith and
22 Wesson .40 caliber pistol, model SW40V with an obliterated serial number, which
23 firearm had been shipped or transported in interstate or foreign commerce. All
24 in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(k). (Docket No. 1.)

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III. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

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5 The following facts are based on the evidence presented at the hearing held
6 on June 1, 2007.

7 Police Officer Ivette Berrios Torres (hereinafter "Officer Berrios"), an agent
8 of the Carolina Tactical Operations Unit for the past 11 years, testified as to the
9 arrest of the defendant on January 30, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. Officer Berrios,
10 accompanied by two officers, all in uniform in an official vehicle, received
11 instructions to drive to Road 860 searching for a green Honda Accord with license
12 plate FJY-376. Officer Berrios' sergeant had received confidential information
13 indicating that this vehicle was in a Carolina housing project and it contained
14 contraband and a secret compartment where a pistol and money were hidden.
15 The officers went near the Carolina housing project and were able to spot the
16 vehicle parked inside the project. Officer Berrios testified that they waited until
17 the moment when the vehicle took off and proceeded to follow it as it drove off
18 very fast in front of the official vehicle.
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22 Officer Berrios noted that one of the numbers in the license plate did not
23 match the license plate provided by the confidential informant. Instead of the
24 license plate reading FJY-376 (license plate number informed confidentially), the
25 license plate read FJY-876. Officer Berrios testified that the vehicle was being
26 driven very fast and changing lanes. At Road 887, along with her fellow officers,
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3 Officer Berrios detained the green Honda Accord. The license plate corresponded
4 to an unregistered vehicle.
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6 The officers proceeded to make a traffic stop. When Officer Berrios
7 approached the driver, she noticed a dark tint on the vehicle's windows. As the
8 driver lowered the window, Officer Berrios noticed a strong odor of raw marijuana,
9 a smell the officer was familiar with based upon her experience and training.
10 Once the driver got out, and went to the back, Officer Berrios noticed the
11 marijuana odor was stronger from the trunk part of the vehicle. According to
12 Officer Berrios, she noticed duct tape on the license plate altering the number 3
13 in license plate FJY-376 to an 8. (See Exhibit 5.)
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16 As in any routine stop, the officer asked the defendant for the vehicle's
17 registration and his driver's license. The events that occurred from this point on
18 are in controversy, including the duct tape on the 3. While Officer Berrios testified
19 that the defendant indicated that he did not have either, the defendant testified
20 that he did provide the officer with a valid vehicle registration and driver's license
21 at the time of the road stop.
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23 Officer Berrios then proceeded to ask the defendant to accompany the
24 officers to the police headquarters so that an officer from the Stolen Vehicle Unit
25 could inspect the vehicle. Officer Berrios also said that she was concerned about
26 the safety of the officers. Officer Berrios suspected that the defendant was
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3 transporting drugs in his vehicle due to the strong marijuana odor coupled with
4 the fact of the fast driving and the registration of the vehicle. Officer Berrios also
5 testified that she felt that the vehicle might have been stolen and that the
6 defendant could be armed. According to Officer Berrios, the defendant was
7 merely asked to accompany the officer to the headquarters which was two to
8 three minutes away. On the other hand, the defendant testified that he was
9 ordered to follow the officers to police headquarters and was escorted with a
10 police vehicle in front of his vehicle while another police vehicle followed the
11 defendant's vehicle. The defendant testified that the officers ordered him to drive
12 his vehicle to the police headquarters in order to measure the window tints.
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15 Subsequently, at the police headquarters, Officer Berrios called the Stolen
16 Vehicle Unit but nobody answered. Officer Berrios proceeded to fill out a PPR28
17 (Exhibit 16), which is an inventory form for stolen vehicles. Officer Berrios
18 testified that at this time she asked the defendant for his driver's license and
19 vehicle registration, and these documents were provided by him. Even though the
20 defendant asserted that the vehicle belonged to him, since the vehicle was
21 registered to a woman's name, Officer Berrios proceeded with the stolen vehicle
22 procedure. Officer Berrios testified that she gave the defendant tickets for two
23 violations of Puerto Rico Traffic Law No. 22, of January 7, 2000, one for illegal
24 change of lanes, and another for violation of the permitted tint exposure. (See
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3 Exhibit 13.) The defendant denied that he was given these tickets on January 30,
4 2007 for illegal change of lanes and having illegally tinted windows. He asserted
5 that to the contrary, the tickets were later given to his attorney in this court.
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7 Officer Berrios decided to commence an inventory search without waiting
8 for the Stolen Vehicle Unit agents, since they would be late. On the form, the
9 agent marked in a box: [x], "involved in the commission of a crime," (Exhibit
10 16), that is, referring to the tape on the license plate which changed a number
11 from 3 to 8. Officer Berrios testified that the duct tape altering the license plate,
12 lead her to conclude that the vehicle did not belong to him. On the other hand,
13 the defendant stated that he never put a black piece of tape on the license plate,
14 stating that FJY-376 is his license plate. The defendant said in his testimony that
15 he had no reason to place a tape on the plate because the vehicle complied with
16 the law.
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18 Officer Berrios testified that the driver opened the trunk with a key. Inside
19 the trunk there was a big bag which contained 10 pounds of marijuana. (See
20 Exhibit 1.) Once the marijuana was discovered, officer Berrios Mirandized the
21 defendant and placed him under arrest. The search continued while the defendant
22 remained handcuffed. During the arguably inventory search, the defendant
23 stated, when asked if there was anything else incriminating, and he said, "keep
24 looking, if you find anything, fine."
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3 Shortly after, Elizabeth Arzuaga (hereinafter "Ms. Arzuaga") arrived stating
4 that she was the owner of the vehicle. She said that she was the wife of the
5 defendant. Officer Berrios testified that even after Ms. Arzuaga arrived and stated
6 she was the owner of the vehicle, she continued the search. Ms. Arzuaga testified
7 that she waited at the police headquarters for two hours before she had direct
8 contact with Officer Berrios even after she had made clear that she was the owner
9 of the vehicle.

12 Officer Berrios testified about how she shined a flashlight through the air
13 conditioning duct, and saw money and a pistol behind the dashboard. She told
14 Ms. Arzuaga to sit on the driver's seat, and asked her if she could see the pistol
15 through the air conditioning ducts. Ms Arzuaga said "I don't know", but she said
16 she saw something metal. Officer Berrios told Ms. Arzuaga, who was scared and
17 had asked if she was going to be arrested, that if she did not give authorization,
18 she could go to the prosecutor and get a search warrant to break the dash. This
19 was when Ms. Arzuaga acceded to sign a form consenting to the search. (See
20 Exhibit 17.) According to Officer Berrios' testimony, the money and the gun were
21 taken from the inside of the vehicle's dashboard (Exhibit 15) after Ms. Arzuaga
22 signed the consent form. The defendant testified that by the time his wife signed
23 the consent form, the dashboard had already been destroyed and the contents
24 had been seized. Officer Berrios was later told by the defendant that he used a
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3 magnet to open the dashboard but had thrown it out on the way to the police
4 station.

6 Special Agent Celinez Núñez, of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and
7 Firearms for the past 8 years, later arrived at the police headquarters. She
8 testified about the strong odor of the marijuana that had been seized, stating that
9 two rooms away from the marijuana, the smell of raw, leafy marijuana could be
10 made out. Special Agent Celinez Núñez said that it seemed that since 10 pounds
11 of marijuana had been found in the trunk, the search had continued. Also, she
12 testified, referring to Exhibit 2, that it reflected the condition of the dashboard
13 when she arrived. There was no plastic shield in front of the dials of the
14 dashboard.

17 IV. ANALYSIS

18 A. Standing

19 In its opposition to the motion to suppress (Docket No. 22.), the
20 government raises the issue of lack of standing on the part of the defendant to
21 challenge the seizure of the weapons and narcotics since it understands that he
22 did not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the Honda Accord.

23 "More than a decade ago the Supreme Court laid to rest the persistent
24 notion that fourth amendment 'standing' and 'reasonable expectation of privacy'
25 are interchangeable concepts." United States v. Bouffard, 917 F.2d 673, 675 (1st
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3 Cir. 1990) (citing Rawlings v. Kentucky, 448 U.S. 98, 104 (1980); Rakas v.
4 Illinois, 439 U.S. 128, 140-48 (1978)). Even though the legal field is reluctant to
5 change this concept, "standing" can no longer connote "a legitimate expectation
6 of privacy in the evidence seized or the premises searched." United States v.
7 Bouffard, 917 F.2d at 675. Rakas and Rawlings have expanded that notion to say
8 that "it is incumbent upon the defendant to establish not only unlawful police
9 conduct, but that the unlawful conduct intruded upon some legitimate expectation
10 of privacy on the part of the defendant who challenges it." Id. "Such an
11 expectation of privacy is a threshold standing requirement that a defendant must
12 establish before the court can proceed with any Fourth Amendment analysis."
13 United States v. Lewis, 40 F.3d 1325, 1333 (1st Cir. 1994) (citing United States
14 v. Cruz Jiménez, 894 F.2d 1, 5 (1st Cir. 1990)). Nonetheless, the reformulation
15 of standing does not change the traditional test. The person must possess "(1)
16 a subjective expectation of privacy in the area searched," United States v.
17 Bouffard, 917 F.2d at 677 (citing United States v. Cruz Jiménez, 894 F.2d at 5);
18 "(2) which society is prepared to recognize as reasonable." United States v.
19 Bouffard, 917 F.2d at 677 (citing California v. Greenwood, 486 U.S. 35, 39
20 (1988)).

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22 The Fourth Amendment recognizes "[t]he right of people to be secured in
23 their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and
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3 seizures. . . ." U.S. Const. amend. IV. Here, the defendant pays the monthly bill
4 of the vehicle, is the sole driver of the vehicle, and the person that operates the
5 vehicle on a daily basis. The only reason why the vehicle is registered to Ms.
6 Arzuaga is that the defendant has poor financial credit. If anyone had standing
7 to attack the search, it was clearly not Ms. Arzuaga. The officers searched an
8 automobile in which defendant has an expectation of privacy which society is
9 prepared to recognize as reasonable. After reviewing the evidence in the record,
10 I find that the defendant, being the *de facto* owner of the vehicle, has standing
11 to assert a Fourth Amendment claim. Therefore, the defendant has standing to
12 seek suppression of the evidence seized.

13 B. The Automobile Exception to a Warrantless Search

14 The Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable searches and
15 seizures forbids most warrantless searches. A warrantless search is
16 presumptively unreasonable under the Fourth Amendment. See California v.
17 Acevedo, 500 U.S. 565, 593 (1991); see also United States v. López, 380 F.3d
18 538, 543 (1st Cir. 2004), cert. denied, 543 U.S. 1074 (2005), reh'g denied, 543
19 U.S. 1179 (2005). One of the most common of the well delineated exceptions to
20 the warrantless search doctrine is the automobile exception. Under this exception
21 to the warrant requirement, "the necessary predicate for law enforcement officers'
22 warrantless search of a motor vehicle is that they have probable cause to believe
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3 that the car contains contraband or other evidence of criminal activity." United
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States v. Panitz, 907 F.2d 1267, 1271 (1st Cir. 1990).

5 Probable cause to conduct a vehicle search "exists where the facts and
6 circumstances known to the arresting officers are sufficient to cause a person of
7 reasonable caution to believe the search is justified. That is, there must have been
8 particular facts indicating that, at the time of the search, the vehicle or a container
9 within it carried contraband, evidence of a crime, or other seizable matter."
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United States v. Martínez-Molina, 64 F.3d 719, 730 (1st Cir. 1995) (citing United
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States v. Infante-Ruiz, 13 F.3d 498, 502 (1st Cir. 1994) (citing 3 Charles Alan
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Wright, Federal Practice and Procedure § 662, at 579 (1982)). The Supreme
13 Court has held the general principle that the requirement of probable cause is
14 satisfied by a qualified individual's perception of a distinctive odor associated with
15 a forbidden substance. See Johnson v. United States, 333 U.S. 10, 13 (1948).
16 In this case, the defendant does not contest the officer's assertion of the illegal
17 change of lanes, nor does he contest the smell of raw marijuana emanating from
18 the driver's window or the trunk of the automobile. The strong odor of raw
19 marijuana, emanating from the defendant's automobile, perceived after a valid
20 traffic stop, provided the probable cause to search.

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22 In Chambers v. Maroney, 399 U.S. 42, 47-52 (1970), the Supreme Court
23 approved the warrantless seizure and subsequent search of a vehicle at a police
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3 station because there was probable cause at the time of the stop to justify an
4 immediate search. Having probable cause to search the automobile at the site of
5 the traffic stop, Officer Berrios was justified to make a later search at the police
6 station. See California v. Acevedo, 500 U.S. at 570 ("the police could search later
7 whenever they could have searched earlier [based on probable cause], had they
8 so chosen") (citing Chambers v. Maroney, 399 U.S. at 51-52); see also Michigan
9 v. Thomas, 458 U.S. 259, 261 (1982). "[T]he relocation of a vehicle prior to the
10 search does not affect the probable cause analysis." United States v. Le, 377 F.
11 Supp. 2d 245, 253 (D. Me. 2005), aff'd by United States v. Cao, 471 F.3d 1 (1st
12 Cir. 2006) (citing California v. Acevedo, 500 U.S. at [569-70] (citing Chambers v.
13 Maroney, 399 U.S. at 51-52)). Officer Berrios was justified to search the
14 defendant's automobile at the police station since she had probable cause to do
15 so at the site of the traffic stop but was concerned for the officers' safety.
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17 Defendant Luna submits in his motion to suppress (Docket No. 16) that the
18 Tactical Operations Department agents exceeded the scope of what an inventory
19 search is when they decided to destroy the vehicle's dash looking for a hidden
20 compartment. Defendant fails to take into consideration that the destruction of
21 the vehicle's dash was made after 10 pounds of marijuana had been discovered
22 in the trunk of the vehicle and immediately after the defendant had been arrested.
23 The scope of a warrantless search conducted under the automobile exception
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3 extends as far as "a magistrate could legitimately authorize by warrant." United
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5 States v. Ross, 456 U.S. 798, 825 (1982).

6 "Once probable cause is found to exist, there is no need to weigh the
7 evidence of probable cause against the privacy interests of the individual whose
8 property was subject to search. Neither is it necessary to apply heightened
9 scrutiny to contraband discovered 'in a container in a locked, hidden compartment'
10 of the automobile." United States v. Le, 377 F. Supp. 2d at 252 (citing and
11 quoting United States v. López, 380 F.3d at 544). The automobile exception
12 allows "a 'probing search' of compartments and containers within the automobile
13 so long as the search is supported by probable cause." California v. Acevedo, 500
14 U.S. at 570 (citing United States v. Ross, 456 U.S. at 800).
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17 The entire seizure and subsequent search of the vehicle having been based
18 on probable cause that the vehicle contained contraband, the entire search was
19 legal as within the ordinary scope of the automobile exception. That the
20 defendant was crafty in secreting a tool of the trade behind a magnet-operated
21 dashboard does not remove the discovered space from the realm of hidden
22 compartments.
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C. Search Incident to an Arrest

25 A search incident to an arrest has been recognized by the courts as a well
26 settled exception to the search warrant requirement of the Fourth Amendment.
27 United States v. Robinson, 414 U.S. 218, 224 (1973). The Supreme Court has
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3 held "that a search 'can be incident to an arrest only if it is substantially
4 contemporaneous with the arrest and is confined to the immediate vicinity of the
5 arrest.'" Shipley v. California, 395 U.S. 818, 819-20 (1969) (quoting Stoner v.
6 California, 376 U.S. 483, 486 (1964)). In relation to warrantless automobile
7 searches, the Supreme Court, referring to the standard set forth in Chimel v.
8 California, 395 U.S. 752, 762-63 (1969), established in New York v. Belton, 453
9 U.S. 454, 460 (1981), that the scope of a search incident to arrest extended to
10 the interior of the passenger compartment of an automobile when the arrestee
11 was an occupant of such vehicle. Furthermore, the Supreme Court has held that
12 "[o]nce an officer determines that there is probable cause to make an arrest, it
13 is reasonable to allow officers to ensure their safety and to preserve evidence by
14 searching the entire passenger compartment." Thornton v. United States, 541
15 U.S. 615, 623 (2004).

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17 In this case, Officer Berrios had probable cause to search the entire vehicle
18 due to the uncontested scent of raw marijuana emanating from the passenger
19 area and the trunk of the defendant's vehicle at the time of the traffic stop. The
20 defendant was arrested immediately after the officers found the 10 pounds of
21 marijuana in the trunk of the defendant's vehicle. From this arrest on, the search
22 is now not only supported the automobile exception when there is probable cause
23 to search, but also by the exception to the search warrant requirement provided
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4 by the broad generalized scope of a search incident to an arrest to preserve
5 evidence. New York v. Belton, 453 U.S. at 461.

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D. Consent

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9 requirements of both a warrant and probable cause is a search that is conducted
10 pursuant to consent." United States v. Meléndez, 301 F.3d 27, 32 (1st Cir. 2002)
11 (quoting Schneckloth v. Bustamonte, 412 U.S. 218, 219 (1973)). Since it has
12 been previously discussed that the seizure and subsequent search of the
13 defendant's vehicle was legal as within the scope of the automobile exception, the
14 analysis of the validity of the consent form signed in this case is moot; as I said
15 in the evidentiary hearing, it is rendered a non-issue. However, since the defense
16 makes much ado of the issue of consent in his energetic, piquant post-hearing
17 memorandum, and because I veritably muzzled defense counsel's valiant efforts
18 to press the vitiated consent of Ms. Arzuaga, I will address the same.
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21 A warrantless search is not unreasonable "where voluntary consent has
22 been obtained, either from the individual whose property is searched, see
23 Schneckloth v. Bustamonte, 412 U.S. 218, 93 S. Ct. 2041, 36 L. Ed. 2d 854
24 (1973), or from a third party who possesses common authority over the
25 premises." United States v. Torres, 188 F. Supp. 2d 155, 157-58 (D.P.R. 2002)
26 (quoting Illinois v. Rodríguez, 497 U.S. 177, 181 (1990)). When consent is given
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3 by one "who possesses common authority over the premises or effects," this
4 consent will be deemed valid "against the absent, non-consenting person with
5 whom that authority is shared." United States v. Marshall, 348 F.3d 281, 284 (1st
6 Cir. 2003) (quoting United States v. Matlock, 415 U.S. 164, 170 (1974)); cf.
7 Georgia v. Randolph, 547 U.S. 103, 108-11 (2006). In the case at hand, Ms.
8 Arzuaga did not pay for the vehicle or use it at all. She did not have the common
9 authority over the defendant's vehicle required by United States v. Torres and
10 Illinois v. Rodriguez to have standing to consent to a search. See Georgia v.
11 Randolph, 547 U.S. at 110.

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13 Furthermore, in order for consent to be valid it must be given voluntarily.
14 United States v. Weidul, 325 F.3d 50, 53 (1st Cir. 2003). In examining the
15 voluntariness of the consent, the courts look at the totality of the circumstances.
16 United States v. Luciano, 329 F.3d 1, 7 (1st Cir. 2003); United States v. Coraine,
17 198 F.3d 306, 309 (1st Cir. 1999); United States v. Barnett, 989 F.2d 546, 554-55
18 (1st Cir. 1993). When looking at the totality of circumstances the court pays close
19 attention to individualized factors bearing on the vulnerability of the consenting
20 party which "are age, education, experience, intelligence, and knowledge of the
21 right to withhold consent." United States v. Barnett, 989 F.2d at 555.

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23 It is uncontested that Ms. Arzuaga was very nervous at the time she
24 signed the consent form. One of the factors taken into consideration by courts in
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3 assessing voluntariness is coercive police behavior. The defendant's testimony,
4 as well as Ms. Arzuaga's indicate that she was not only nervous and
5 uncomfortable with the police's presence, but that she was also threatened with
6 an unreasonable arrest. She thought that by signing the consent form she would
7 get the stressful situation over with; she was right. A consent form signed under
8 the totality of these circumstances should not be understood to be the product of
9 a voluntary consent.

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11 Finally, in the suppression hearing, there were contradicting versions about
12 when the consent form had been signed. When using a consent form to obtain
13 consent to search, the form must be signed before the search is conducted;
14 otherwise the consent is invalid. See United States v. Tibbs, 49 F. Supp. 2d 47,
15 53-54 (D. Mass. 1999). The defendant testified that when Ms. Arzuaga signed the
16 consent form, the police officers had already found the secret spot hidden behind
17 the dash of the automobile. I credit the defendant's version. Therefore, it is my
18 conclusion that Ms. Arzuaga's consent was not valid for three reasons: first, she
19 did not have the authority to consent to such a search; second, it was given
20 involuntarily; and third, consent was acquired after the search had been
21 performed.

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23 However, even if I would not credit the defendant's testimony, as I do, the
24 totality of the circumstances forces me to conclude that, for the reasons
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3 previously stated, the seizure and subsequent search of the defendant's vehicle
4 was lawful. Consent is unnecessary to validate a seizure and subsequent search
5 that is itself legal as within the ordinary scope of the automobile exception and the
6 search incident to an arrest exception. In any event, after being read the Miranda
7 warnings, the defendant, upon questioning, clearly stated "Keep looking. If you
8 find anything, fine." Whether ironic or sardonic, the statement was an invitation,
9 post-Miranda, to continue the search, a search obviously geared to find evidence.
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11 See Georgia v. Randolph, 547 U.S. at 125 (Breyer, J., concurring).

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13 III. CONCLUSION

14 Defendant Luna, being the *de facto* owner of the vehicle that was seized and
15 searched, has "a subjective expectation of privacy in the area searched, which
16 society is prepared to recognize as reasonable. . . ." United States v. Bouffard,
17 917 F.2d at 677 (citations omitted). Thus, the defendant has standing to present
18 a motion to suppress the evidence seized from his vehicle.
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21 Even though there are a number of allegations that remain in controversy,
22 the fact of the scent of raw marijuana emanating from the trunk of the vehicle is
23 uncontested. This fact provided Officer Berrios with probable cause to believe the
24 vehicle contained contraband. See Johnson v. United States, 333 U.S. at 13, and
25 United States v. Martinez-Molina, 64 F.3d at 730. A warrantless seizure and
26 subsequent search of a vehicle at a police station is legal when at the time of the
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3 road stop there was probable cause to justify an immediate search. See
4 Chambers v. Maroney, 399 U.S. at 47-52; see also Michigan v. Thomas, 458 U.S.
5 at 261; United States v. Le, 377 F. Supp. 2d at 253. The automobile exception
6 allows "a 'probing search' of compartments and containers within the automobile
7 so long as the search is supported by probable cause." California v. Acevedo, 500
8 U.S. at 570. Once the marijuana was found in the trunk of the vehicle and the
9 defendant was arrested, the continuance of the search was also valid as within the
10 scope of the search incident to an arrest exception. See New York v. Belton, 453
11 U.S. at 460; see also Thornton v. United States, 541 U.S. at 623. Finally, as the
12 registered owner of the vehicle, Ms. Arzuaga might have standing to sue and be
13 sued civilly in a tort action. However, in real terms, she had no standing to put
14 a halt to the search since the vehicle and its contents belonged to the defendant.
15 Regardless of the errant police action in acquiring a defective consent *post haec*,
16 her consent *vel non* is yet a non-issue.

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18 Thus, I recommend that the motion to suppress be DENIED.
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21 Under the provisions of Rule 72(d), Local Rules, District of Puerto Rico, any
22 party who objects to this report and recommendation must file a written objection
23 thereto with the Clerk of this Court within ten (10) days of the party's receipt of
24 this report and recommendation. The written objections must specifically identify
25 the portion of the recommendation, or report to which objection is made and the
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3 basis for such objections. Failure to comply with this rule precludes further
4 appellate review. See Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140, 155 (1985); Davet v.
5 Maccorone, 973 F.2d 22, 30-31 (1st Cir. 1992); Paterson-Leitch Co. v. Mass. Mun.
6 Wholesale Elec. Co., 840 F.2d 985 (1st Cir. 1988); Borden v. Sec'y of Health &

7 Human Servs., 836 F.2d 4, 6 (1st Cir. 1987); Scott v. Schweiker, 702 F.2d 13, 14
8 (1st Cir. 1983); United States v. Vega, 678 F.2d 376, 378-79 (1st Cir. 1982); Park
9 Motor Mart, Inc. v. Ford Motor Co., 616 F.2d 603 (1st Cir. 1980).

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11 At San Juan, Puerto Rico, this 13th day of July, 2007.

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14 S/ JUSTO ARENAS
15 Chief United States Magistrate Judge
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